

critical digest

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August 4, 1952

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

Fall Drama Prospects

A Night at Mme. Tussaud's, a new thriller by Edwin Justis Mayer, will mark debut of Peter Lorre as Broadway actor and director. Miriam Hopkins set co-star in coming Ben Kranz production...Say it with Flowers, Jean Guitton new play, will return Oscar Karlweis to Broadway. Production designed and directed by Harry Horner.

Summer Tryouts

Evening with Beatrice Lillie, featuring Miss Lillie and Reginald Gardiner is making tour of strawhat show shops before being presented in New York by Edward Duryea Dowling. Vern, Variety, viewing it at Richard Aldrich's Falmouth, Mass., Playhouse, okayed it for Broadway if first act is cleaned and tightened. He billed it as an intimate variety concert show with carriage trade trimmings. NBC Leon Pearson urged troupe to stick to citronella circuit and not try for Broadway run. Broadcaster Bolton comedy tested at John Hancock Hall, Boston, panned by Taylor, Billboard. Except for Illona Massey cast was insufficiently rehearsed and directed. Script is reminiscent of Shopworn Angel...The Flashing Stream, Charles Morgan drama tried out at Stockbridge, Mass., Playhouse, is just a thin piece of playwriting that is confused, wordy and boring, comments Russ, Variety.

Hits Revisited

Rewriting job on Wish You Were Here, reports Bron, Variety, has changed tone of show. Now it's more sentimental and romantic, the love story more simple and idyllic. Show is altogether very pleasant, tuneful, funny with no dead or dull spots. Trade paper critic suggests \$6 or \$4.80 top instead of the \$7.20 tab. Watts, Post, disagreed. In spite of doctoring job, musical presented by Leland Hayward seems aimless and pointless. Major reason for Post critic's disappointment was that he, like many of his colleagues, has such a fondness for Arthur Kober's original Having Wonderful Time.

New acting team of Betty Field and Burgess Meredith, comprising entire cast of The Fourposter, didn't meet with favor of Francis, Billboard, who fears that more than 50 percent of comedy becomes shallow and unbelievable due to their attempt to play the Jan de Hartog script for laughs...Jack Carter's portrayal of Top Banana lead was first rate, praised Bron, Variety. His brash, hearty, varied performance kept the show spinning. Other recent cast changes in musical made distinct improvements. Audrey Meadows was better than Rose Marie in the female comedy lead.

Playwrights' Capacity

Chapman, News, is ready to wage verbal war with James Thurber recent comment that congressional investigations have terrified playwrights into writing nothing but junk. News critic thinks "junk" is all that most of them seem capable of. He agreed with Moss Hart's thought that the stage remains the last free forum. But Chapman wonders if anybody has sense enough to use it.

News & Notes

Star and Garter, tabloid production of Mike Todd's show by Harold Minsky, replaced Peep Show at Holiday...Judith Anderson signed for John Brown's Body reading tour scheduled by Paul Gregory with Tyrone Power and Raymond Massey..."International Theatre" new monthly, due August 18th.

' Cumulative NYC Ratings '

D - Daily

W - Weekly

M - Monthly

B - Broadcast

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|--------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| DT - NY Times | DJC - Journal of Commerce | WCM - Chr. Science Monitor |
| DH - NY Herald Tribune | DWJ - Wall Street Journal | WC - Commonwealth |
| DN - NY News | DWW - Women's Wear | WCU - Cue |
| DM - NY Mirror | WB - Billboard | WN - Nation |
| DC - NY Compass | WV - Variety | WNR - New Republic |
| DP - NY Post | WCD - Critical Digest | WNS - Newsweek |
| DJ - NY Journal American | WGN - George Jean Nathan | WNY - New Yorker |
| DW - NY World Tele-Sun | WWM - Ward Morehouse | WSR - Saturday Review |
| DB - Brooklyn Eagle | BC - WCBS Bill Leonard | WT - Time |
| DL - L.I. Press | BL - New Leader-WEVD | MP - Park East |

' Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them not if they think they will be hits. "So-so" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

THE FOURPOSTER-10/24/51

GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50

THE KING AND I-3/29/51

THE MALE ANIMAL-4/30/52

THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51

MRS. McTHING-2/20/52

PAL JOEY-1/3/52

NEW FACES OF 1952-5/16/52

A NIGHT IN VENICE-6/26/52

POINT OF NO RETURN-12/13/51

SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49

TOP BANANA-11/1/51

WISH YOU WERE HERE-6/25/52

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| PROS: 19 | CON: DH DP WGM WWM BL WC WNY |
| | NONE: DWJ WN WNR WSR |
| PROS: 29 | CON: WN |
| PROS: 29 | CON: WN |
| PROS: 27 | NONE: WGN MP WNR |
| PROS: 26 | CON: WCD WGN NONE: WN MP |
| PROS: 20 | CON: DM DJ BC BL WNR WT WGN NONE: WNR MP |
| PROS: 25 | CON: BL NONE: WNR |
| PROS: 25 | CON: DP WT WGN NONE: WN WNR |
| PROS: 20 | CON: DC WSR NONE: WGN WNR BC WT MP |
| PROS: 25 | CON: DW BL WN WNR WT |
| PROS: 29 | CON: WT |
| PROS: 23 | CON: DP DJ BL NONE: WCM WN WWR WSR |
| PROS: 20 | CON: DC DB DL DJC WV BL |
| CON: | DT DH DM DP DJ DW DWJ WB WWM WC WCU WNS WNY WSR WT |
| | NONE: DWW WCD WGN BC WCM WN WNR MP |

' Off Broadway '

Love In Our Time, a new drama written and directed by Anita Grannis, being presented at Originals Only Playhouse...Living Theatre's production of Ubu the King postponed. New opening date of Alfred Jarry's play is now August 5th...Play was postponed because actor in title role injured in fall off stage...Wedding in Japan, presented by New Playwrights at Yugoslav American Hall, now open to public Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings, remainder of week for theatre party bookings...Amato Opera Theatre concludes 44 week season with Rigoletto. Group will reopen after Labor Day...Widowers' Houses, currently at Greenwich Mews Theatre, now playing Wednesday through Saturday. Show will run through August, admission by voluntary contribution...American Lyric Theatre added Ira Wolfson's satire of The Cocktail Party entitled Hopalong Freud to its repertory program at Provincetown...Theatre de Lys plans to park patrons cars in nearby garages... NBC Leon Pearson recommended Masque & Lyre productions of Gilbert & Sullivan.

Two hundred and thirty-two unproduced manuscripts have been "doctored" by Dramatists Forum, founder Ray Yates told Gelb, Times. Group now in its fifth year has moved Thursday meetings to Green Room above Amato Opera Theatre, 159 Bleecker Street. Each meeting hears a script by a new playwright read by group of actors. Merits and demerits are then debated. Membership of group is nearing 500 with about 100 attending each session. Sunday productions of some plays are being planned for fall.

• Green Room Department •

EMPLOYMENT FACTS...Drama school heads should have heart to heart talks with each applicant, explaining the dearth of acting opportunities, "Stage" editorial urges. British trade paper believes that if research were undertaken concerning fate of drama school graduates, the findings could scarcely hearten even the most adventurous and persevering newcomer.

BROADWAY SUMMER...Spring predictions that this would be an outstanding summer thanks to conventions and visitors bound for Europe, acted on false premises, reminds Sylvester, News...Coleman, Mirror, does not think heat is to blame for slow season, because all Broadway houses are air conditioned.

LONDON REPORT...British theatre is ahead of US in acting and activity, Watts, Post, summarizes after his recent trip. Each player in every London production he saw played his part to perfection. Economic factors make it easier for London producer to put on a play, and cheaper tickets make it easier for theatre fans to see more plays. London theatre surpasses contemporary US stage in sheer creative vitality and excitement.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Literary style of NY critics is about that of a tobacco auctioneer grading job lots of leaf, an unnamed Hollywood writer informed Eaton, Press... Phillip Barry's plays will become classics, to be revived over and over, predicts Burr, Playbill...ANTA Album should be revived, urges Coleman, Mirror.

COLUMN TIPS...J.J. Shubert is, or will be, married, whispers Winchell...Actor readying suit against Wish You Were Here, claiming he injured himself during auditions, reports Kilgallen...Bob Shackleton may sub for Robert Alda, Guys and Dolls, Gardner hears...Arthur Miller didn't want Eli Kazan to direct his new play, Woltman, WT&S believes, because of latter's House Un-American Committee testimony.

MAIL BOX...First gondola box offices were small boats used by showboats, Bob Downing reminds A Night in Venice...Drama desks receiving letters proclaiming downfall of Rodgers and Hammerstein type musicals, Coleman, Mirror, reveals.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES...Geraldine Page, Summer and Smoke lead at Circle in Square, does not believe making "rounds" will help her acting talents, she told Hawkins, WT&S.

• Theatre News Roundup •

Equity dispute with Playwrights Company on English cast of The Trial of Mr. Pickwick settled by producers bringing over ten British actors before August 16th union deadline...Katherine Harvey subbed quickly for Gwen Omeron, A Night in Venice, when latter collapsed onstage at Jones Beach Marine Stadium...A Night in Venice reports record week's gross of \$111,574...Ira Gershwin writing new lyrics for "It Ain't Necessarily So," which is being sung in new Porgy and Bess by Cab Calloway. Revival moves to Washington, D.C. and then abroad to Vienna, London and Berlin...League of NY Theatre meeting with Equity on union's new alien restrictions..."Show of Month" Third Annual Awards presented to Jule Styne, producer and Helen Gallagher, star, for Pal Joey...Elaine Malbin, 22 year old white soprano, has been signed by Robert Josephs for Negro role in Charles Friedman play, My Darlin' Aida...Negro acting groups insist producer could have found Negro for role...Robert C. Schnitzer named general manager of US presentations at Berlin festival 1952...Charles Jehlinger, head of Academy of Dramatic Arts, is dead...Elias Weinstock, booking agent for Shubert theatres, also died.

' Digests of Famous Hits - Three Men On a Horse '

Four featured players, a co-author and the producer all became Broadway success as a result of the original production of John Cecil Holm and George Abbott's Three Men On a Horse, which opened at the Playhouse Theatre, January 30, 1935, after a brief tryout in Washington, D.C. Produced by Alex Yokel in association with Warner Brothers, the original cast included Shirley Booth, William Lynn, Sam Levene and Teddy Hart. Garson Kanin played the bit part of "Al," and was overlooked and unmentioned by most of the daily reviewers.

Favorite now of little and summer theatre groups, the comedy played for 835 performances on Broadway. At one time three road companies were traveling about the nation, playing the saga of the verse writer turned race picker in more than 163 towns. Yokel, a press agent who went into debt to launch the comedy, estimated play took in more than three million dollars before the 1936 Warner Brothers picture was released. Film starred Joan Blondell, Frank McHugh, Allen Jenkins, and Sam Levene and Teddy Hart of the original cast.

All daily critics agreed comedy was hilarious, but there was a difference of opinion on its appeal. Several felt horse racing lingo would not attract the female theatregoer. All complimented George Abbott for another of his fast-moving direction jobs, and the entire cast was praised lavishly. Atkinson, Times, admitted show had a few labored moments, but otherwise it was most shrewd, jocular horseplay. The horse race terms, he added, were verified by an expert, though the onstage odds were too high. Hammond, Herald Tribune, nominated Abbott for "Theatre's Most Able Conjuror." American critic loved comedy but panned Boris Aronson scenery as most dismal seen in years. Sets looked like they were dipped in mixture of tobacco juice and chronic jaundice, he quipped.

Mantle, News, was leader of thought that women would like the show. Publicity later dwelt on fact that females liked comedy as much as their male escorts. Brown, Post, found it often hilarious, often tedious. Garis, World Telegram, okayed worthy cast in fast and funny play. Anderson, Journal American, raved about the slightly hilarious and insane play. He noted that Benchley, New Yorker, asked him if he was laughing too hard. New Yorker critic reported he bruised himself with laughter, though he didn't know anything about betting at all. Burr, Billboard, termed it a "wow," while Ihee, Variety, enjoyed the comedy. Variety men noted that glossary in program was useless. Burr complained that opening night curtain was six minutes late.

' Legit Stuff '

Martha Wright, South Pacific, contract extended to August 31, 1953...John Gerstad, The Male Animal, took two day leave from cast to see Saratoga, NY, Playhouse production of The Fig Leaf, new comedy he scripted with Norman Brooks...Top Banana "vacationing" till September 1st...Donald Cook returned to The Moon Is Blue...Wish You Were Here and South Pacific softball teams tilted in Central Park.

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